Education
MANITOBA

Volume 6
Number 3
May 2008

Published by School Programs Division (Kindergarten to Grade 12) of Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth

Increasing Aboriginal Students' Educational Achievement: A Message from the Minister

Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth (MECY), along with parents, teachers, educational leaders, and other educational partners, recognizes the vital need to increase Aboriginal students' educational achievement.

As such, in 2004, MECY developed a three-year strategy entitled *Aboriginal Education Action Plan 2004–2007* to identify goals and priorities for Aboriginal education in Manitoba. In October 2007, that three-year period came to an end. Within the action plan, a number of activities were outlined, based on the following four objectives:

- Increase high school graduation rates
- Increase access to and completion of post-secondary education
- Increase successful entry into and participation in the labour market
- Improve the research base for Aboriginal education and employment

Reports that highlight significant activities of the *Aboriginal Education Action Plan 2004–2007* were distributed to Manitoba schools and posted online at <www.edu.gov.mb.ca/abedu/action_plan/index.html>. I would like to encourage educators, parents, and interested community members to review this information, which includes the government's current strategies and future plans for Aboriginal education.

In April 2007, MECY, along with Manitoba Advanced Education and Literacy and Manitoba Competitiveness, Training and Trade, began renewing the action plan for another three-year period. From July to November 2007, consultations were held with Aboriginal and educational stakeholders to allow for a broad dialogue to obtain input into the development of the renewed plan. These stakeholder consultations provided direction on what the community believes to be the most important issues that the action plan needs to address to ensure Aboriginal Manitobans achieve greater success.

Building upon the initial plan, the renewed action plan is a work in progress that strives to build on existing activities and incorporate new opportunities based on lessons learned. The plan is adaptable so that strategic initiatives and specific activities can evolve in response to the changing needs and dynamic environment of Aboriginal education.

This action plan is part of MECY's ongoing efforts to work together with schools, families, and the community, improving a sense of engagement amongst students and, in so doing, providing for better opportunities for high school completion. By improving student participation and success in their individual learning, as well as access to adult and post-secondary education, more opportunities for meaningful participation in the labour market are created.

I am committed to continuing work with partner groups to ensure access to relevant, engaging, high-quality, and responsive education that meets the needs of every learner. I hope this will provide all students with another opportunity to become engaged in an educational experience that is relevant, engaging, and leads to lifelong learning.

Honourable Peter Bjornson
Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth

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Aboriginal Languages and Cultures in Manitoba

By Wanda Barker

Many participants in various consultation sessions facilitated by Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth have identified the development of curricula for teaching and learning Aboriginal languages and cultures as a priority. As a result, in November 2007, the Department released *Kindergarten to Grade 12 Aboriginal Languages and Cultures: Manitoba Curriculum Framework of Outcomes*.

This new curriculum is the result of extensive collaboration among various individuals and groups. The voices of the Elders were vital when seeking guidance on the revitalization, preservation, and maintenance of Aboriginal languages and cultures. According to traditional Aboriginal perspectives, the wisdom of the Elders is central to cultural learning. Elders are the keepers of knowledge, and it is their guidance that Aboriginal people seek as they strive for balance in their relationships with others and the natural world.

Aboriginal youth are also an integral part of Aboriginal language and cultural revitalization. Education of the young is the primary means for a culture to pass on its accumulated knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes. Those who learn of their languages and cultural background will be able to develop and maintain connections to their roots and become the future keepers of knowledge.

Kindergarten to Grade 12 Aboriginal Languages and Cultures: Manitoba Curriculum Framework of Outcomes provides guidelines for language and cultural programming and is intended for the six main Aboriginal languages of Manitoba: Cree, Ojibwe, Oji-Cree, Dakota, Dene, and Michif. This curriculum provides Manitoba student learning outcomes, as well as a focus and direction for Aboriginal languages and cultural learning.

Although North American Aboriginal peoples share common world views and values, their concepts and practices will continue to evolve to reflect changing environments. To reflect this diversity, the specific cultural and language focus will be decided upon by communities and schools. These stakeholders will also decide on the content that will be developed to address the learning outcomes in the framework.

This curriculum is available from the Manitoba Text Book Bureau (see below) and on the Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth website at <www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/abedu/framework/index.html>.

For more information related to the content of this document, contact

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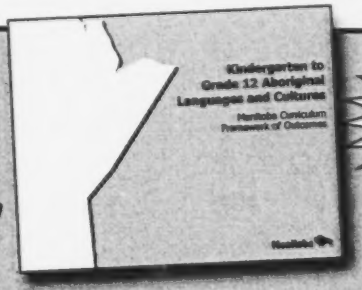
Visit the MTBB website to order *Kindergarten to Grade 12 Aboriginal Languages and Cultures: Manitoba Curriculum Framework of Outcomes* (stock number 80475) or many other Aboriginal resources.



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Supporting Citizenship Education in the Classroom

By Hugh Sigurdson

Citizenship education helps fulfill one of the primary overall goals of education: to provide students with the knowledge, values, and skills necessary to participate as active and responsible citizens in our democratic society.

Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth is committed to assisting and encouraging students to become actively involved in citizenship activities, and to supporting educators in the implementation of the citizenship component of the social studies curriculum.

To this end, programs have been developed over the past few years that benefit both our youth and our educators. These include the Manitoba Youth Leadership Scholarship, Grants for Innovations in Citizenship Education, an annual Seminar in Citizenship Education for educators, and an annual Youth Citizenship Conference.

As a result of these programs, students and educators have become engaged in various endeavours that benefit not only the students but the overall community. The Innovations grants have allowed classes and whole schools to undertake projects such as those at École Selkirk Junior High, where students collaborated with several community stakeholders, including the RCMP, Family Services, City Council, Probation Services, and Leisure Services, to address the needs of youth and to raise people's awareness of youth's ability to become actively involved in the community in a positive way.

Another example is where Grade 6 and 7 students from William Whyte School embarked on a major activism project: an after-school drop-in program called the Fun Zone, which was run by kids for kids. Students designed invitations and permission slips and distributed them throughout the community.

A Grade 1 class at Dalhousie School hosted a citizenship court and gained an appreciation of the rights and responsibilities that go along with Canadian citizenship, as well as a sense of pride in being Canadian.

Many Grade 12 students from across Manitoba have earned a $500 Youth Leadership Scholarship by volunteering their time toward various projects aimed at promoting healthy living. These projects have included coaching or assisting with coaching younger students in volleyball, basketball, skating, and other recreational activities. Some students volunteered in hospitals, at youth organizations such as 4-H groups, and at community clubs. These activities have not only benefited their communities, they have also benefited these Grade 12 students who have gained citizenship and leadership experience, not to mention $500 to assist with their continuing education.

The annual Youth Citizenship Conference has given high school students an opportunity to network with each other, share their successes, and identify challenges they face in their schools and communities. This has resulted in students starting their own human rights groups, hosting human rights days, creating videos on diversity issues, and hosting multicultural days, to name a few examples. The theme of the 2007 conference was Democracy in Action, and students discussed key issues and priorities for themselves, their communities, Manitoba, and the world. They then had the opportunity to discuss these issues with five Cabinet Ministers from the Government of Manitoba. Through these conferences, youth have an opportunity to bring about positive change in their schools and communities and to have their voices heard.

With a new social studies curriculum that has citizenship as its core concept, educators have naturally been eager to learn more about how to teach this concept and to access all available resources and ideas around promoting active, responsible citizenship. The annual Seminar in Citizenship Education is offered to address that need, and the two seminars that have been held to date have provided those supports and have dealt with various aspects of citizenship education. At these seminars, educators heard from students and teachers who have used innovative approaches in citizenship education. They also gained insight into how to address topics such as human rights, social justice, welcoming new Canadians, and Aboriginal issues by having discussions with experts in those areas.

Two related programs offered by the Office of the Speaker of the Manitoba Legislature, with the cooperation of all Members of the Legislative Assembly, are the Teachers' Institute and Classroom in the Legislature. The Teachers' Institute is an exciting opportunity for educators to experience a first-hand view of democracy at work in our province. Classroom in the Legislature is a well received program that provides Manitobans with the opportunity to visit the Legislative Building and learn about our democratic process, and role-play how our laws are made. The program can be adapted to particular grade levels, and combines discussion and interactive, fun games.

For more information about the Teachers' Institute and Classroom in the Legislature programs, visit the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba website at <www.gov.mb.ca/legislature>. Information about other programs is available on the Citizenship Education page of the Department website at <www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/citizenship/index.html> or the Citizenship page of the MB4Youth website, accessible from the sidebar at <http:/web2.gov.mb.ca/mb4youth>, or contact

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Teaching in a Manitoba-Affiliated Overseas School

By Donna Smith
Principal, Manitoba Program, Yang Guang Qing School, Beijing

Yang Guang Qing (YGQ) School in the recently developed southern outskirts of Beijing, China is part of the Manitoba-affiliated overseas school program, which offers international students the opportunity to achieve a high school diploma based on the Manitoba curriculum.

Because this program requires teachers who are certified in Manitoba, it also provides an opportunity for Manitoba teachers to gain experience in interesting, challenging, and highly rewarding new environments.

Every student in the Manitoba program at YGQ is an English as an additional language (EAL) student. Many begin Grade 10 with only a rudimentary knowledge of English from their studies in Chinese elementary and middle schools. With the intensive EAL program in Grade 10 and additional English classes in Grades 11 and 12, many students successfully complete their coursework, which consists of Chinese credits taught in Mandarin and Manitoba credits taught in English. Successful students graduate with both Chinese and Manitoba diplomas that are recognized by both countries. With this diploma, students are able to pursue their education further in Canada. We have found that most YGQ students who graduate from this program go on to begin their university studies in Manitoba.

"We have found that most YGQ students who graduate from this program go on to begin their university studies in Manitoba."

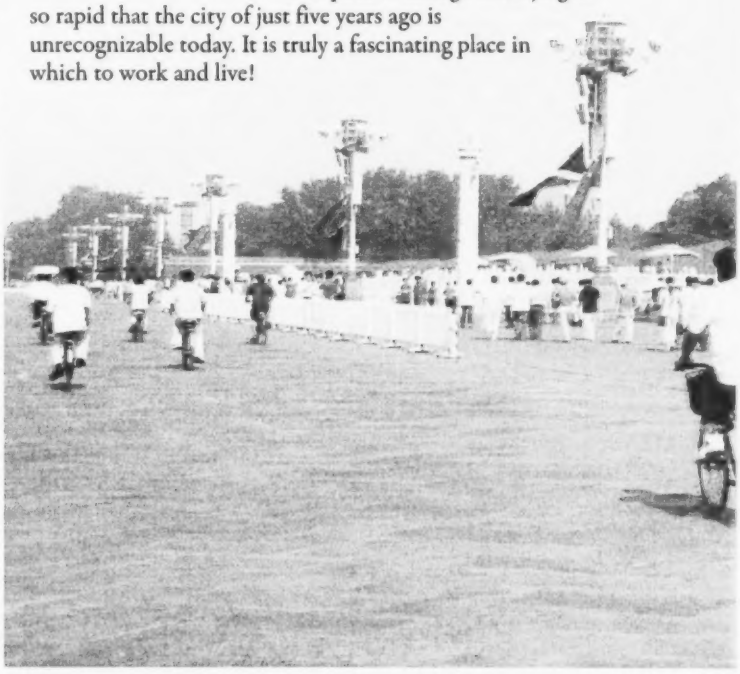
The Chinese model of schooling encourages mastery and faithful reproduction of the textual material, based on teacher lectures and notes. In contrast, the Western methods, which are paramount in the Manitoba curricula, use a variety of instructional and assessment strategies and encourage students to think independently and critically and to work collaboratively. Students must adapt to working in both models.

The school day in China is very long. Students have nine classes per day beginning at 7:30 in the morning and ending at 5:00 in the afternoon. They are expected to study every evening. Consequently, no student has time for a part-time job, and few participate in additional activities such as music lessons or organized sports. Therefore, the Manitoba program activities, such as the Halloween and Christmas parties, speech competition, ski trip, intramural street hockey, English movie nights, and the NBA Club, are eagerly anticipated.

Life in Beijing is also a study in contrasts. It is an ancient city that is rapidly changing and developing. Six-hundred-year-old hutongs (courtyard homes) are being torn down and replaced with modern 40-storey housing complexes. Construction cranes fill the skyline. The ubiquitous bicycles are rapidly being replaced by cars. Bicycle lanes are turning into parking lanes. Every day, 1,200 new cars are added to the already-clogged Beijing streets and expressways. Meanwhile, three-wheel bicycle carts deliver bottled water to homes, and farmers bring their produce to street markets in horse-drawn carts. Elderly men and women practice tai chi in the morning along the grassy verge of the expressway. Mao jackets have disappeared and have been replaced with jeans and T-shirts.

Beijing is busily preparing for the 2008 Summer Olympics. New subway lines are being readied and the city is preparing for the influx of foreign tourists. Temples and the Forbidden City have been freshly painted, and taxi drivers are taking English lessons. New nightclubs and restaurants of all types open daily. Chinese menus will soon receive standard translations, so that the Chinglish "white germ in ham row" will become a ham omelet.

The pace of change in Beijing is so rapid that the city of just five years ago is unrecognizable today. It is truly a fascinating place in which to work and live!



Overseas Schools and the Manitoba Curriculum

By Ken Horton

Over the past eight years, Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth has made formal agreements to offer the Manitoba provincial curriculum in schools in China, Thailand, Turkey, and Egypt.

Some of the schools offer high school programming to prepare students for future studies at Manitoba universities; others begin English language programming in the Early Years with a comprehensive international program based on the Manitoba curriculum. A blended program is also offered, which allows students to meet Manitoba's high school graduation requirements as well as those of their host country, giving these students the option of pursuing post-secondary education at home or in Canada. Whatever the program, to gain a Manitoba high school graduation diploma, all overseas students must write the Manitoba provincial Grade 12 standards tests and meet the same graduation requirements as all other Manitoba students.

A major condition in all the agreements is that the schools must hire Manitoba-certified teachers. This provides opportunities for adventurous Manitoba teachers who would like to broaden their teaching experiences working and living in a different cultural setting. Teachers are hired by the individual schools through a Manitoba-based agent, and teacher salaries and benefits vary by school and by country. Each school has a designated Manitoba administrator or lead teacher who provides administrative and curricular leadership.

Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth staff make annual visits to each school to liaise with teachers, administrators, and school operators, to provide curriculum and professional development support, and to ensure that the requirements itemized in the agreements are being met.

Some of the Manitoba teachers currently working in overseas affiliated schools are new to the profession; others, who have spent most of their careers teaching and living in Manitoba, are now experiencing new and exciting challenges. Donna Smith is currently in her third year as principal of the Manitoba program in Yang Guang Qing School in Beijing, and the experiences she relates in the previous article are echoed by most of our teachers overseas, particularly those who are flexible, adaptable, and enjoy the challenges of working and living in a different cultural setting.

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Planning Assessments that Promote Learning

By Ken Clark

Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth consultants Linda Thorlakson and Warren Nickerson were invited by instructors at the universities of Winnipeg, Manitoba, and Brandon to present a series of workshops for pre-service teachers.

These workshops explored formative assessment practices (assessment *for* learning) and their power to affect learning.

At the start, participants in the workshops engaged in a synectics activity that invited them to think laterally about the nature of a concept. This activity is a way for teachers to find out students' initial beliefs about a topic, allowing teachers to make adjustments to the lesson before they begin. In the activity, the participants were asked about the concept of assessment, and made the following connections:

Brandon University students Kirby Adams and Jim Shaw explore purposes of assessment.

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Assessment is like a lamp, because it sheds light on the subject.

Assessment is like a toaster, because it gets used daily. It's easily adjustable to suit the needs of different kinds of bread. Plus, if you're not careful, some bread ends up burned.

Feedback from session evaluations was very positive. One weekend college student commented, "I think the most important thing I learned today is that assessment is a continual process for the students and the teacher." Middle Years teacher candidates voiced their appreciation for having practical strategies modelled by the presenters.

The Department is also releasing *Communicating Student Learning*, a support document that examines how teachers, students, and parents communicate about student learning. Both this document and *Rethinking Assessment with Purpose in Mind* urge teachers to continually examine their assessment practices to refine the ways that students receive information about their achievement. Feedback and grading have a substantial effect on student engagement and success.

For more information about the Department's assessment support documents, or for information about the two-day assessment in-service during its August Summer Institute, visit <www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/assess/index.html> or contact

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Canadian Science Achievement

By Ken Clark

A recent report reveals that the science literacy of Canadian students is among the highest in the world.

The report is titled *Measuring Up: Canadian Results of the OECD PISA Study — The Performance of Canada's Youth in Science, Reading, and Mathematics: PISA 2006 First Results for Canadians Aged 15.* It presents results and analysis of the spring 2006 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), and is available for free on the Council of Ministers of Education Website at <www.cmec.ca/pisa>. PISA assesses student literacy in mathematics, science, and reading, and collects contextual information from students and school administrators. Science literacy was the primary domain of the 2006 test.

Manitoba students ranked in the middle among provinces. Work is underway to study the report in more detail to determine what Manitoba science educators can do to improve educational programming in Manitoba.

The next large-scale assessment involving Manitoba students is the 2009 PISA study. Approximately 2,000 fifteen-year-olds in 100 Manitoba schools will participate. The focus will be on reading literacy, which was also the focus of the 2000 PISA assessment. This will provide an opportunity to see how reading literacy and related educational context in Manitoba and Canada have changed over time and relative to other participating countries. Pending the outcome of an international pilot being conducted this spring (including in Manitoba), the 2009 assessment will include a component that will focus on comprehension and discernment when retrieving information from the Internet.

These assessments provide a unique and valuable perspective for evaluating educational programming in Canada and in Manitoba, and they would not be possible without the commitment and cooperation of Manitoba educators in the administration of these studies.

Comments, insights, and queries regarding these assessments are welcome and can be made by contacting

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Global Connections through ISO

By Susan Wersch

Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth's Independent Study Option (ISO) provides a flexible way for students to achieve high school credits in a manner that meets their needs.

ISO learners are a diverse group of students. The majority resides in Manitoba, but some are studying the Manitoba curriculum as they live and travel internationally. Many are high school students who require credits for graduation, but there are also students who are unable to attend school, such as elite athletes and the children of missionaries, diplomats, and others who are employed in temporary postings in foreign countries.

Whatever the situation, ISO offers tremendous flexibility. This has benefited students in the following two families, who have used ISO to complete all the courses for their high school diplomas.

Traveling with ISO

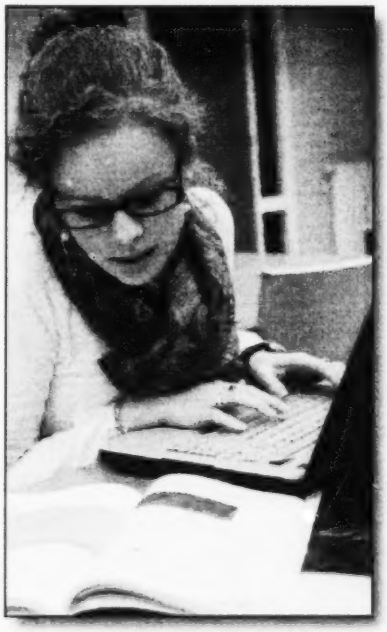
Both children in the Holmes family were registered in the ISO program for the entire four years they lived on the Island of Cyprus. The following is their account of this experience:

ISO offered a variety of courses that allowed our son to complete all 28 credits to prepare for university. Our daughter has registered in Grade 11 since our return to Manitoba.

We are thrilled with how many people notice how well-spoken both our children are. An English teacher was amazed at our son's vocabulary and knowledge of many topics and indicated how impressed she was with the quality of his education. We receive compliments from our daughter's current school in regards to her reading ability and independent work habits.

The support from the ISO staff and tutor/markers, who are subject-area specialists, was quick and efficient. One tutor/marker was so excited about our son's progress he phoned us, not keeping in mind the eight-hour time difference. Needless to say we all had fun and celebrated his success, regardless of the time of day or night. Our family's connection with the ISO community has been a positive educational experience.

The amount of work required and the varied types of assignments made for well rounded, hard-working students. Both children learned to research, write papers, letters, resumés, and articles. This knowledge has served them well in job prospects as well as in all areas of their life where communication is important. We highly recommend ISO for those who are or want to become independent learners.



Studying Independently with ISO

ISO also supports students and parents, such as the Graupner family, who wanted to take all their studies within their rural community and to pursue other methods of learning at home.

Studying independently is challenging, as you must determine how you best learn. In Grade 10, my son took control of his education, confident in his ability to complete his studies at a distance with ISO.

ISO requires the full-time application of time and energy to complete the courses. Math courses frequently involve challenging assignments that sparked my son's imagination and ingenuity. The exams reflected the course content, and were able to be written under the supervision of a proctor in our home community.

My role as a parent was as a student mentor and a home administrator. I had a positive experience with the ISO administration and personnel as we worked together with my son. To maintain quality programs, distance learning courses could be further enhanced through content editing, upgrading, as well as course critiquing.

My son recently decided to continue his distance learning experience through online post-secondary courses while completing his ISO print course work. As with any endeavour, success in the ISO program is dependent on the student's desire to be successful.

Support for Independent Learners

ISO tutor/markers are certified, experienced educators who are available to provide learners with one-to-one support and assess their learning. All tutor/markers have toll-free phone numbers and most can be contacted through email. Learners are most likely to successfully complete their courses when they communicate regularly with their tutor/marker.

Besides their tutor/markers, learners can also be assisted by family members, community members, peers, and siblings. If they are attending school, they may also be assisted by teachers and their school facilitator (ISO facilitators are educators designated by their schools to assist independent learners).

For more information, contact the ISO office at 1-800-465-9915 or by email at <distance.learning@gov.mb.ca>.

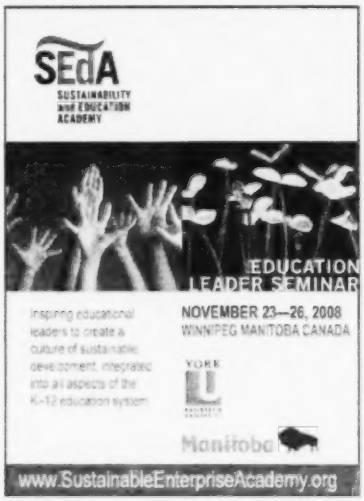
Educating for Sustainability in Manitoba

Sustainability and Education Academy

By Christina McDonald

York University, in partnership with Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, Manitoba Advanced Education and Literacy, Winnipeg and Pembina Trails school divisions, and faculties of education, is bringing the Sustainability and Education Academy (SEdA) to Manitoba from November 23–26, 2008.

By participating in the academy, teams of senior education officials from school divisions and faculties of education will be trained as sustainability leaders, and have opportunities to develop education for sustainable development (ESD) action plans to incorporate sustainable development into policies, operations, and school and faculty of education programs.



Choose the Future: Education for Sustainable Development Conference

By Christina McDonald

The Manitoba Education for Sustainable Development Working Group (MESDWG), in partnership with the Science Teachers Association of Manitoba (STAM), will also be hosting an International Education for Sustainable Development Conference on November 26–28, 2008. Educators will be most interested in attending on November 27–28.

For more information about SEdA and the ESD Conference, please visit our website at <www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/esd/>
or contact

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MECY-Hydro Grant Awards

By Anne MacDiarmid

In April 2008, Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, in partnership with Manitoba Hydro, awarded up to $2000 to 17 schools to support the planning and teaching of a sustainability-focused unit.

The project summaries can be viewed on the Department's sustainable development website, and they are an excellent example of the dedication and creativity that Manitoba educators and their students exhibit in the field of education for sustainable development (ESD).

For more information, visit the ESD website at <www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/esd/grant/esd_08.html>.

Working Towards Greener Schools in Manitoba

By Anne MacDiarmid

To enable action and learning that focuses on the environmental component of ESD, Green Manitoba, an agency of the Government of Manitoba, is working to develop new and exciting programs and resources to help Manitoba schools become greener. This includes supporting actions that result in improved energy and water efficiency and waste minimization, sustainable transportation, and naturalization projects. The Department has been collaborating with Green Manitoba on this initiative by helping to identify opportunities for making hands-on applied and curricular connections with environmental stewardship, active citizenship, and economic sustainability. An online survey was sent out in early spring to better understand what ESD activities are underway in Manitoba schools. This survey requested information on what schools are doing to be green and what additional support they need to further their environmental stewardship activities. If your school has not completed the survey or if you would like more information on school greening programs, visit the Green Manitoba website at <www.greenmanitoba.ca>.

For more information and to keep updated on events for the coming year, visit the ESD website at <www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/esd/>.

Teachers, schools, or school divisions interested in participating in ESD professional learning, please contact

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MERN Manitoba Education Research Profile
www.mern.ca
Connecting research in education ⟷ to policy and practice

Aboriginal Culture in the School

By Dr. Helen D. Armstrong

Recently released 2006 Statistics Canada data note the growth of our Aboriginal population, particularly in the two provinces of Manitoba and Saskatchewan. These data, as well as information from other research studies, confirm that Aboriginal people still struggle with the legacy of systemic discrimination: their educational and employment levels are not equal to those of the non-Aboriginal majority.

I am involved in a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada/Community-University Research Alliances (SSHRC/CURA) program that involves bringing Aboriginal artist-educators into participating schools and assessing their effect on Aboriginal students' cognitive skills, cultural awareness, psycho-social development, sense of identity, and self-esteem. The project is conducted with an appreciation of the strength of Aboriginal communities and the gifts within them. The impact of Aboriginal cultural instruction in selected schools in terms of learning, school attendance, and retention of Aboriginal students is also examined.

The hypothesis is that exposure to Aboriginal culture in the school will improve Aboriginal children's cultural awareness and positive sense of identity.

The project, which is currently beginning its fourth of six years, involves both quantitative and qualitative methods in a longitudinal follow-up design. The hypothesis is that exposure to Aboriginal culture in the school will improve Aboriginal children's cultural awareness and positive sense of identity. This, in turn, will increase the personal relevance and importance of the school, which then will translate into positive school-related behaviours and achievement. The secondary purpose, community development, is specifically related to the contribution of community members' skills and talents.

Five First Nations communities are currently enrolled in the research project, each with a community-based coordinator who organizes the artist-educator visits for in-school and after-school programming, as well as other aspects of the project such as in-school testing. Graduate and undergraduate studies support the programming, particularly the involvement of teachers and educational assistants in the review and in-school use of grade- and/or subject-specific resources by and for Aboriginal people. These resources will then support and be integrated with the visits of the community artist-educators and, occasionally, visiting artists from other communities. Children are learning, for example, how to make dance regalia and drums and to use the Excel computer program to create beading designs. They also learn to sing, drum, and dance, and even "scratch" like DJs. They learn the traditional stories of their community, the traditional cultural practices of the particular language group, as well as the language itself.

I am also the principal investigator of a study that involves the exploration of how youth coming before the justice system would describe an "ideal school" where they would want to remain enrolled until graduation. That study involves interviews with youth and their caregivers, as well as examination of other research studies and federal statistics. Most of these youth, as other data indicate, are still both Aboriginal and male.

Both studies emphasize the importance of community members' contributions of gifts and talents—including, in the latter study, the youth themselves—with reference to the successful education of children and youth. It is hoped that the findings from both studies will provide a template for culturally relevant curricular materials and program evaluation that can be used in all schools and communities, and that will be supported by funding from both the provincial and federal governments.

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Profile

Dr. Helen D. Armstrong is a professor with the Faculty of Education at Brandon University, and her current research focus is Aboriginal education. She is the principal investigator of a SSHRC/CURA grant entitled Community-Based Aboriginal Curriculum Initiatives: Implementation and Evaluation. Other research interests include organizational theory and development, the work of theorist Mary Parker Follett, and productivity.

Connecting Culture and Community at Fort Rouge School

By Heather Robertson
Community Support Worker, Fort Rouge School

If you poke your head into the gymnasium at Fort Rouge School on a Wednesday afternoon, you will see the students of the Medicine Lodge Pow Wow Club drumming and singing, creating wonderful sounds that can be heard echoing throughout the school.

The Medicine Lodge Pow Wow Club provides students with the opportunity to learn about and experience Aboriginal culture. Students are learning about the Seven Teachings, different types of dance, as well as how to sing and drum.

This weekly after-school program started in January 2008, and there are currently 55 students enrolled in the program. Its focus is not only to raise awareness of Aboriginal culture among students, but also to build their confidence and self-esteem through dancing and singing. The club helps both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students feel proud about what they can accomplish.

The Medicine Lodge Pow Wow Club also allows parents to get involved with the school, as there are many different volunteer opportunities with this program. Parents come early and help prepare snacks for the children, including, at times, traditional bannock. Families are always welcome to join us, and the students' younger siblings often enjoy being part of the school activities.

The program is facilitated by Nelson Akicita Chaske of the Dakota Nation. Chaske currently works for Winnipeg School Division as an Aboriginal Cultural Assistant. The Pow Wow Club was developed through a grassroots approach by a few people with the same goal: to better the lives of children. Chaske's program is ground-breaking in that it does not just do "parrot" dances; it allows the children to grow into their own style of dance, sharing with the group their own gifts.

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The Medicine Lodge Pow Wow Club will run weekly until the middle of June. During this time, students will experience many unique and meaningful opportunities through field trips, guest dancers, and community celebrations. Each month, something special is planned for the children that they normally wouldn't have an opportunity to experience.

At the end of the year, the community is invited to come and share in the celebration of the children's success at an outdoor pow wow. The facilitators and parents are currently working to make regalia for the students to dance in during the pow wow, providing a wonderful opportunity for parents to get involved in the school community.

The Medicine Lodge Pow Wow Club has been a huge success at Fort Rouge School, and the school is looking to continue the program in the 2008/2009 school year. Although it takes a lot of hard work and commitment from staff and facilitators, Chaske can sum up why the program is so important to the school: "On the rare day that I feel tired, I walk into Fort Rouge School and I am greeted by the many smiling, happy faces. They are so eager to be part of the Pow Wow Club, and I am reminded of what my Elders told me: 'Remember where you came from. Your ancestors are watching you. Make them proud!'"

Education
MANITOBA

ISSN 0704-2671

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Distribution:

Education Manitoba is distributed free to schools in Manitoba. This newsletter can be viewed online at <www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/newsletter/>.

A similar document has been developed by the Bureau de l'éducation française Division for the Français and the French Immersion Programs.

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